The Fortress, the Guardian, and the Intruder: A Psychological Architecture of Silence

The biography of Herta Bertel (1943–2024) can be understood as the lifelong construction of a psychic fortress. To survive the traumatic debris of a childhood in Lungau—marked by hunger, the shame of bedwetting, and the emotional coldness of life as a foster child—an identity was created that left no room for vulnerability. This "Fortress" served to protect the wounded self but required the systematic destruction of all sensitive internal parts.

The Fortress: A Bastion of Status and Facade

The Fortress represents the bourgeois life that Herta Bertel built in the city of Salzburg. Every element of this architecture was carefully chosen to cover the stain of her origins:

- **The Walls:** Employment as a secretary at the Public Health Department and the title of "Frau Doktor" through marriage formed a massive bulwark against former poverty.
- **The Interior:** A 119 m^2 freehold apartment in Hellbrunner Straße functioned as a physical symbol of invulnerability. Here, order reigned; here, she was "somebody."
- **The Isolation:** Fleeing into the mountains and avoiding crowds were strategic retreats into the inner courtyards of the castle, where the laboriously maintained facade could not be questioned by the eyes of strangers.

The Guardian: Dr. Michael Bertel

Dr. Michael Bertel assumed the role of the loyal Guardian within this system. His function was essential for maintaining Herta Bertel’s psychological stability:

- **Legitimation:** As a physician, he lent the Fortress the necessary social weight. He was the guarantor that the transformation from "poor child" to "respected citizen" was complete.
- **Protection through Routine:** Conquering 400,000 meters in altitude together and maintaining a strict daily structure provided a framework in which emotional

intimacy was replaced by functional activity. The Guardian did not demand the opening of the dungeons; he accepted the walls and guarded them instead.
- **Care until the End:** Even as the physical shell decayed, the Guardian remained at his post, buying groceries and nursing the dying woman, thereby preserving the illusion of control and autonomy within the fortress walls until the very last breath.

The Intruder: Peter Siegfried Krug

Within this rigid architecture, the only son, Peter Siegfried Krug, was inevitably perceived as an "Intruder." His mere existence was a threat to the entire foundation of the Fortress:

- **The Mirror of Defeat:** The son originated from the time before the Fortress was built. He was linked to the era of unskilled labor, the illegitimate pregnancy, and the poverty of 1966. In his eyes, Herta Bertel saw not the success of the present, but the shame of the past.
- **The Threat to the Facade:** A child instinctively demands empathy and emotional nakedness—qualities that Herta Bertel had to destroy to build her Fortress. Because she fought the sensitive part within herself, she had to fight it in her son as well. Any stirrings of sensitivity in him were branded as "failure" to justify her own harshness.
- **The Destruction of Evidence:** The systematic destruction of photographs of the son in the family albums was the mistress of the castle's final attempt to rewrite history. The Intruder was to be erased from the chronicles of the Fortress so that the facade of the flawless "Frau Doktor" could remain without contradiction.

Conclusion of the Analysis

Life in Hellbrunner Straße was not a marriage in the sense of emotional merging, but a highly functional living arrangement for the maintenance of a protective barrier. Herta Bertel chose harshness as a survival strategy. While the Guardian, Dr. Michael Bertel, supported the walls, the son, Peter Siegfried Krug, became the target of a lifelong defensive reaction. The unforgiveness until death was no coincidence; it was the necessary consequence of a psyche that feared the collapse of its Fortress more than the loneliness of a pitiless death.

The Life of Herta Bertel (1943–2024)

The Winter of 1943: A Shadowed Beginning

The story began in the sterile, cold halls of the **Salzburg State Hospital (SALK)**. It was **Tuesday, December 21, 1943**, a dark winter during the heights of war, when **Herta Brigitte Krug** entered the world. Her arrival was not celebrated with fanfares; she was born an "unmarried child," a label that, in the social fabric of the time, was a brand of shame.

Her mother, **Maria Krug**, was a woman silenced twice over—once by nature, being deaf-mute from birth, and once by a society that cruelly labeled her as "stupid" because of her disability. Herta's father, a locksmith residing in Vienna, remained a distant figure who would eventually pass away at the age of 59.

Soon after her birth, the infant Herta was taken from the city to the rugged, high-altitude landscape of **Lessach in Lungau**. There, the rustic scenery was beautiful, but the life for a foster child was anything but.

The Girl with the Sheet: A Childhood of Survival

Growing up in various foster homes on farms in Lungau, Herta learned early that life was a transaction of labor. She was not a child who played with dolls; her toys were the sticks she found in the dirt of the farmyards.

The trauma of her youth was physical and public. Suffering from enuresis (bed-wetting), she was subjected to a ritual of public humiliation: she was forced to wander through the village carrying her urine-soaked sheet for all to see. The mockery of the neighbors and the gnawing hunger of poverty etched a permanent melancholy into her features. She was hospitalized repeatedly during these years, her young body simply giving out from starvation. These years forged a "survival mode" that would never truly leave her.

The Ascent to the City

As a young adult, Herta fled the mountains for the city of Salzburg. Though she possessed only a primary school education and started as an unskilled laborer, a turning point came through the mediation of a **Mr. Limoser**. He helped her secure a position as a secretary at the **Salzburg Public Health Department (Gesundheitsamt)** at **Anton-Neumayr-Platz 3**.

For decades, Herta walked the halls near the *Haus der Natur*. It was here she formed a lifelong professional bond with **Josef Mlcak (1926–2012)**, a man legendary in Salzburg for his service to the fire brigade and Red Cross.

Her personal life was a search for the four walls she never truly owned as a child. She lived first at **Müllner Hauptstraße 18** on the third floor, before moving to a 32-square-meter municipal flat at **Goethestraße 12, Door 21** in Itzling. It was during this era, while briefly with a companion named **Siegfried "Sigi" Gmachl**, that she walked into the **Bärenwirt Inn** near the Müllner Church and met **Dr. Michael Bertel**.

The Architect of the Burg

Michael Bertel, born June 9, 1944, was the "Guardian" her psyche required. They married on **August 5, 1977**. Herta's ascent from an unskilled worker to "Frau Doktor" was the fulfillment of a lifelong hunger for status.

After a brief stay in **Künstlerhausgasse**, the couple purchased a **119-square-meter top-floor flat** at **Hellbrunner Straße 7/b**. This was her fortress. For 47 years, she lived there in financial stability, a stark contrast to the farmhouses of her youth. Yet, the luxury did not heal her. She remained gaunt, her black hair framing a face that rarely broke into a laugh. She surrounded herself with the works of **Dostoyevsky** and classical music, possessing a near-miraculous memory for melodies, identifying pieces from the very first notes.

The Son: The Mirror of the Past

On **November 23, 1966**, Herta gave birth to her only son, **Peter Siegfried Krug**. The birth was agonizing, a physical trauma she would later recount with bitterness. According to Herta, the father was **Dr. Peter Strobl**, a tall, blond physician with whom she had danced in Kitzbühel between 1962 and 1966.

Because Strobl had another family and had suggested an abortion, Herta viewed Peter through a lens of resentment. She waived all alimony, erased Strobl's name from the baptismal certificate (Vol. 61, p. 171, Parish of St. Johannes), and placed Peter in an infant home immediately.

For Peter, childhood was a rotation of institutions, including the home at **Kirchenstraße 33**. Once a week, he visited Herta at Goethestraße. These visits were not filled with warmth; they were characterized by a heavy, suffocating "speechlessness" and constant accusations of guilt. Herta saw in Peter the "failure" she feared in herself.

The relationship reached a terminal point on **December 24, 2011**. During a final visit, Herta told Peter it would have been better if she had aborted him. Peter called her that Christmas Eve and told her they would never meet again. He kept his word for 13 years.

The Solitude of the Peaks

In nature, Herta found the only peace she could tolerate. Along with Michael, she hiked a staggering **400,000 meters in altitude** over their decades together. She drove her Ford to the most remote trailheads, seeking the silence of wild animals and avoiding the "stress" of crowds. In winter, she took to cross-country skis, a gift from her husband. In the mountains, she was a "fighter," defined by the rustic Lungau landscape of her birth.

The Final Silence

The end was marked by a cruel irony. A medical error during a hip operation left her with one side untreated. Osteoarthritis took her mobility. For her final two years (**2022–2024**), the woman who had climbed 400,000 meters was trapped in a bed on the top floor of an old building with no lift.

She suffered in silence, refusing painkillers until the agony became unbearable, eventually relying on morphine. On **Friday, April 12, 2024, at 3:37 p.m.**, the hour of her death, she fell asleep at **Hellbrunner Straße 7/b** and did not wake up.

In death, as in life, she sought to erase the traces. There was no funeral. There is no grave. Her body was cremated, and her ashes remain in the urn in Michael's apartment. In her final years, she had even reached into the family albums, tearing out and destroying the photographs of her son, a final attempt to edit the history of the fortress she had built.

A Comparative Analysis: Hofmannsthal's *Jedermann* vs. Herta Bertel

The performance of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Jedermann* (Everyman) on the Salzburg Cathedral Square is a cornerstone of the city's cultural identity. When examining the life of Herta Bertel (1943–2024) against this allegorical framework, striking parallels and profound deviations emerge, highlighting the tension between theatrical myth and psychological reality.

I. Structural Similarities: The Rise and the Reckoning

1. The Illusion of Earthly Security In the play, *Jedermann* defines himself through his "Mammon" (Wealth) and his social standing. Similarly, Herta Bertel constructed a life defined by material and social markers: the 119 m^2 freehold apartment at Hellbrunner Straße, the status of "Frau Doktor," and her decades of service as a civil servant. For both, these assets served as a bulwark against the existential fear of insignificance and the memory of "nothingness."

2. The Denial of Transience *Jedermann* lives as if death will never arrive, ignoring the "Call of Death" until it is inescapable. Herta Bertel, despite her professional proximity to a health authority and her own physical decline (osteoarthritis, bedridden status from 2022–2024), maintained a rigid "survival mode." She clung to the status symbols and the "Fortress" of her apartment until her final breath at 15:37 on April 12, 2024.

3. The Isolation of the Final Hour The core of the *Everyman* allegory is that in death, one stands alone; neither friends, nor wealth, nor family can accompany the soul. Herta Bertel's final years mirrored this isolation. Trapped in a top-floor apartment without a lift, separated from her only son since 2011, and attended only by her "Guardian" (Dr. Michael Bertel), her passing was a literal enactment of the play's lonely climax.

II. Fundamental Differences: The Absence of Catharsis

While the structures of their lives match, the moral outcomes diverge sharply. The Salzburg festival play is a drama of **redemption**, whereas Herta Bertel's biography remains a drama of **unresolved trauma**.

1. Repentance vs. Persistent Rigidity The turning point of Hofmannsthal's play is *Jedermann's* transition from arrogance to humility. He recognizes his sins, finds "Glaube" (Faith) and "Werke" (Good Deeds), and repents. In contrast, Herta Bertel demonstrated no such shift. Rather than seeking reconciliation with her son, Peter Siegfried Krug, she deepened the divide. During her final encounter with him, she expressed the wish that he had been aborted—validating the advice of the biological father, Dr. Peter Strobl, from 1966. This stance represents the antithesis of the play's message of forgiveness.

2. The Rejection of the "Child" as Hope In the play, the "Good Deeds" appear as a weak, frail child who gains strength only when *Jedermann* repents. For Herta Bertel, the child (Peter) was never a source of spiritual strength or a path to redemption. Instead,

he remained the "Intruder" and a symbol of her past "defeat." By wishing for his non-existence, she rejected the very "work" that could have facilitated her emotional catharsis.

3. The Destruction of Memory While *Jedermann* prepares his soul for the afterlife, Herta Bertel focused on the erasure of history. Her act of tearing the son's photographs out of the family albums was a final attempt to edit reality. While the theatrical *Jedermann* faces his past to transcend it, Herta Bertel attempted to destroy the evidence of her past to maintain the facade of the "Fortress."

III. Conclusion: The Realist Tragedy

Herta Bertel represents a **"Salzburg Everyman" without the Cathedral Square ending.** While the play offers the audience a comforting resolution through divine mercy and human change, the reality of Herta Bertel's life reflects the cold persistence of transgenerational trauma. Her life was an unvarnished version of the allegory: the story of a human being who achieved every material goal the "City of Salzburg" prizes—titles, property, and professional respect—but who remained imprisoned within the "Salzburger Enge" (Salzburg Narrowness) of her own heart.

Her refusal to repent and her final rejection of her son mark her not as a figure of religious myth, but as a tragic figure of psychological realism—a woman who survived the hunger of Lungau only to perish in the emotional starvation of her own success.

From Victim to Perpetrator: The Metamorphosis of a Traumatized Soul into a Petit-Bourgeois Caricature

The life story of Herta Bertel (1943–2024) is a testament to a tragic psychological transformation. It is the journey from a humiliated, "uprooted" child in the rural Lungau region to a woman who, in old age, embodied the exact coldness, harshness, and social exclusion that had nearly destroyed her as a child. This development can be understood as a desperate but destructive attempt to overcome her own powerlessness by adopting petit-bourgeois values.

The Phase of Total Powerlessness: The Wounded Child

In the 1940s and 50s, Herta Krug was the personification of the stigma prevalent in rural society. As the illegitimate child of a deaf-mute mother, she was an outsider from birth.

- **Public Marking:** The ritual of being forced to wander through the village of Lessach with a urine-soaked sheet was more than a punishment; it was a ritual expulsion from the community. Here, the child was taught: "You are dirty, you are worthless, you are a failure."
- **Existential Hardship:** Hunger and heavy physical labor on foreign farms solidified the realization that survival was only possible through unconditional subordination and the suppression of one's own needs.

Flight into Structure: The Construction of Defense

Moving to the city of Salzburg began the phase of "self-rescue" through adaptation. Herta Bertel recognized that the "urban system" offered different rules for advancement than the village:

- **Civil Service as a Shield:** Her job at the Public Health Office at Anton-Neumayr-Platz provided, for the first time in her life, an unassailable structure. The hierarchy gave her security.
- **Adopting the Mask:** She began to define herself by what she had previously lacked: material security. The hunger of the past was replaced by the urge for property; the shame of the past by the pride in titles and the social status of "Frau Doktor."

Metamorphosis into the "Spießbürger": Identification with the Aggressor

In psychology, "identification with the aggressor" describes a mechanism in which the victim adopts the traits of those who once tormented them in order to never feel weak again. For Herta Bertel, this led to the development of a classic petit-bourgeois ("Spießbürger") mentality:

- **Moral Superiority as a Weapon:** The woman who was once mocked as a "bedwetter" now became a relentless judge herself. She transferred the harshness she had suffered one-to-one onto her son. He was declared the new "failure"—a projection of her own deeply buried inferiority complex.
- **Facade and Conformism:** "What people think" became the supreme law. Any deviation from the norm, any form of emotional openness or unconventionality

(such as her son's yoga activities), was perceived as a threat to her laboriously constructed bourgeois fortress.

- **The Annihilation of the Sensitive:** Because she could only control her own pain through total emotional coldness, no one in her environment was allowed to "feel." Empathic connection was despised as weakness—exactly as others had been pitiless toward her in Lungau.

The Bitter End: Completion of the Caricature

By the end of her life, the transformation was complete. Herta Bertel was no longer the victim of farmers or the village community; she had become an oppressor herself, ruling from her 119 m^2 freehold apartment over a past she tried to undo by tearing up photographs.

- **The Irony of Fate:** She sought financial stability and social recognition to find happiness. However, the psychic structure she built for protection allowed for no happiness. She died in the same emotional loneliness in which she had grown up as a foster child—only this time surrounded by material wealth.

Summary: Herta Bertel's development shows the cruelest side of trauma: it often turns victims into people who feed the very monsters they once fled. Her "petit-bourgeoisie" was not a lifestyle choice out of conviction, but a pathological armor. Those who cannot process the harshness of the world often become harsh themselves to avoid being broken again.

The Architect of Coldness: The Ascent to "Frau Doktor" and the Betrayal of Her Own Flesh

The biography of Herta Bertel (1943–2024) is the story of a woman who purchased her own social salvation through the systematic destruction of her only son’s existence, Peter Siegfried Krug. It is the record of a metamorphosis: from a destitute unskilled laborer to an established "Spießbürgerin" (petit-bourgeois) whose laboriously constructed facade left no room for the suffering of her son—even when that suffering became life-threatening.

1966: The Year of Shame and Helplessness

When Herta Krug gave birth to her son Peter Siegfried on November 23, 1966, she possessed nothing. She was an unskilled laborer, living in modest accommodation at Müllner Hauptstraße 18, and bore the social stigma of an unmarried mother.

The biological father, the physician Dr. Peter Strobl, had already abandoned her during the pregnancy and advised her to have an abortion. Herta Krug found herself in a state of total helplessness. Yet, instead of transforming this powerlessness into empathy for her child, the infant became, for her, living proof of her social defeat. Immediately after birth, Peter was cast off to an infant home, and later to a children's home in Itzling. The tracks for a childhood of poverty and uprooting were laid while Herta began working on her own ascent.

The Alliance with Status: The Path to "Frau Doktor"

The turning point in Herta's life came through meeting Dr. Michael Bertel at the *Bärenwirt*. Their marriage in 1977 was the decisive escape from the precariat. Through Michael Bertel, she attained everything she never had in Lungau:

- **Financial Security:** The move from the small studio in Itzling to the magnificent 119 m^2 apartment at Hellbrunner Straße.
- **Social Prestige:** The title and recognition as the wife of a medical doctor.
- **The Bourgeois Mask:** An identity as an order-loving, law-abiding civil servant of the Public Health Office.

However, the higher Herta Bertel rose, the deeper she had to bury the part of her past that did not fit this image. That part was her son.

The Construction of the "Failure"

For the now-established "Spießbürgerin," Peter Siegfried Krug became a paradox: he was her own flesh and blood, but he was also the witness to her time as a "cheap unskilled worker." To protect her new self-image, Herta Bertel began a lifelong campaign of devaluation:

- **Notorious Stigmatization:** She branded Peter as a "failure" and a "good-for-nothing." His poor grades and his later search for an unconventional life path (yoga, art) were interpreted by her as moral deficiencies.
- **The Projection of Her Own Fear:** By defining her son as worthless, she reassured herself of her own superiority. Her petit-bourgeois lifestyle was not characterized by generosity, but by a cruel exclusivity.

The Ultimate Betrayal: Coldness and Homelessness

The darkest chapter of this mother-child relationship was revealed when Peter Siegfried Krug fell into existential distress. While Herta Bertel lived in her warm, spacious freehold apartment and climbed a total of 400,000 meters in altitude during her leisure time with her husband, she abandoned her son in the freezing cold of winter.

Even when Peter was homeless and death by freezing or starvation was a real danger, the door at Hellbrunner Straße remained closed. Herta Bertel offered no help. For her, his misery was merely proof of the correctness of her judgment: he was a "failure," and failures had no place in her world—even if it was her own son. This act of abandonment was the final completion of her identification with the very harshness she herself had experienced as a child in Lungau.

The End of an Illusion

Until her death in 2024, Herta Bertel clung to her contempt. Her wish that Peter had been aborted—which she hurled at his face even in old age—was the final seal on a relationship that never truly was.

She died as a wealthy woman, surrounded by material security, yet in a spiritual poverty that forbade her from reaching out her hand to her only child. Her life shows that social advancement without emotional processing often leads only to the walls of the new fortress being built from the ice of one's own past.

The Role of Dr. Michael Bertel as the "Guardian"

The dynamics within the household at Hellbrunner Straße 7/b were not those of a traditional family history, but rather a psychological system with rigidly assigned roles. While Herta Bertel designed the architecture of coldness, her husband, Dr. Michael Bertel, assumed the function that stabilized this system over decades. He was not an active persecutor, but his passivity and silence made him an indispensable component in the suppression of Peter Siegfried Krug.

1. The Guardian: Stability as a Purpose in Life

Dr. Michael Bertel was not a co-creator of a vibrant family culture, but the administrator of a status quo. His role as the "Guardian" was defined by the following aspects:

- **Moral Validation:** Through his status as a physician, he provided Herta Bertel's laboriously constructed facade with the necessary weight and inviolability. He served as the "seal of quality" for her social salvation. A medical doctor by her side signaled to the outside world that reason and seriousness prevailed, masking Herta’s internal fragmentation.
- **Conflict Avoidance:** To preserve the inner peace of the "fortress," he adapted to the emotional climate dictated by Herta. In a relationship with a highly dominant, traumatized woman, "peace" often meant total submission to her narrative. He purchased his tranquility through obedience.
- **Functional Love:** His affection for her was not expressed through emotional depth or the questioning of her dark sides, but through the joint accomplishment of feats (climbing 400,000 meters in altitude) and dutiful care until her death. It was a love of action that avoided the abysses of the soul.

2. Why He Did Not Stand by Peter Siegfried Krug

The fact that Dr. Michael Bertel did not support the son in moments of extreme distress—extending even to homelessness—has deep-seated structural reasons:

- **Loyalty to the Sovereign:** The moment Herta declared Peter an "intruder" and a "failure," Michael had to choose. Had he stood by Peter, he would have shaken the very foundations of Herta’s fortress. Since his own identity and lifestyle were closely linked to this fortress, he chose loyalty to his wife over humanity toward his stepson.
- **Fear of Herta’s Dominance:** Herta Bertel acted out of a deep survival instinct. Anyone who contradicted her became an enemy. Michael Bertel likely knew that standing up for Peter would have meant a war within the apartment—a war he could not have won against Herta’s relentless hardness.
- **The Convenience of Abstraction:** It is easier to view someone as a "failure" when one's partner feeds that image daily. Michael adopted Herta's perspective as a kind of "convenient truth" to numb his own moral dissonance. It absolved him of the duty to help.

3. Limited Control and Agency

It must be noted that Michael Bertel possessed only limited agency within this system:

- **Herta’s "Survival Mode":** A person stuck in the permanent survival mode of their childhood, as Herta Bertel was, does not allow for a true partnership of equals. She dictated the emotional rules of the game. Michael could manage and guard the fortress, but he could not unilaterally remodel the architecture of coldness.
- **The Price of Protection:** He offered her the protection she needed, but in doing so, he became a prisoner of her rigid worldview. His room for maneuver ended where Herta’s traumas began. He became a tool for her defense.

Summary

Dr. Michael Bertel played the role of the **Enabler**. Without his passive consent and material security, Herta could never have maintained her contempt for Peter Siegfried Krug so absolutely and consistently. He was not the architect of the cruelty, but he was the one who maintained the walls behind which that cruelty took place. His silence regarding the son’s suffering, particularly during his homelessness, was the price he paid for his own emotional tranquility within the "fortress."